

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor
Office of the Governor of the State of New York
633 3rd Ave. 38th Floor
New York, NY 10017

March 18, 2021

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We write in relation to the budget crisis faced by New York State in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. As you know, the budgetary pressures created by the necessary social distancing protocols have devastated numerous businesses throughout the state and destabilized families everywhere. While we understand the size of this crisis does not lend itself to a silver-bullet solution, we hope that the federal assistance provided by the American Rescue Plan will fend off the worst budgetary consequences.

In a crisis, every part of the government's budget becomes even more precious as those resources typically go towards serving those most in need. However, with children having spent most of the last year oscillating between in-person and remote learning, education has once again demonstrated the vital role it plays in our communities. With new variants of the virus continuing to emerge and federal assistance on the way, we know that the last days of the pandemic will hold many difficult choices. **As such, we urge you to protect education funding from any further budget cuts as a result the pandemic.**

Sadly, we have seen this dynamic unfold before. The misguided adoption of austerity measures after 2008 in the hopes of stabilizing state and local budgets only permanently slashed human services budgets across the state. Despite New York's economy growing steadily throughout the period, state funding for human services aid to local governments has fallen by 26%.¹ We fear that this will happen again with a direct impact on the education budget.

Education has suffered considerably since this period of relative austerity. New York State cut more education funding on a per-pupil basis than all but two states in the wake of the Great Recession slashing over 7% of per-pupil spending.² **At the local level, New York City balanced the largest portion of its budget cuts on the back of the Department of Education by slashing nearly \$1 billion in funding.**³ At a distance, these numbers can begin to appear

¹ Parrot, James; Butel, Angela. "New York State's Historic Disinvestment in Human Services Since the Great Recession: The Impact in New York City and Around the State." *Center for New York City Affairs*. March 2019.

² Oliff, Phil; Leachman, Michael. "New School Year Brings Steep Cuts in State Funding for Schools." *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Oct. 7, 2011

³ Wolf, Courtney. "The New York City Budget Since the Recession." *The Citizens Budget Commission*. Feb. 6, 2011

somewhat mechanical in nature and fail to grasp the associated human cost of these losses. Cuts of this scale imply not only forgoing necessary infrastructural repairs in schools, but also reusing tattered textbooks, eliminating the support staff that keep hallways clean and afterschool programs operating, and laying off teachers who provide the backbone of the entire public education system. Returning to this type of austerity will only further entrench socioeconomic differences in New York damaging the social fabric of our state as well as the economic dynamism that sures up our balance sheet.

Thankfully, federal assistance should preclude the need to find cost-cutting measures in the education budget or elsewhere. While the most recent state-level budget update projects a revenue loss of just under \$15 billion for the current fiscal year, the projected federal assistance should more than make up the difference.⁴ New York will benefit significantly from both the state and local government funding as well as the education funding allocated in the American Rescue Plan. Estimates based on pre-existing formulas suggest the plan will allot New York State over \$23 billion in federal aid.⁵ Additionally, the education portion of the American Rescue Plan is estimated to provide New York State public school districts with almost \$9 billion in additional funding to help schools pay for necessary renovations to become more COVID-safe as well as retain or rehire school staff.⁶

In recent months, you have made clear that New York would need at least \$15 billion to avoid the type of devastating budget cuts we all fear. With an aid package that far exceeds this number, we now hope that you will uphold your side of the bargain and protect vital human services like education during future budget negotiations. In the midst of a pandemic that has taken direct aim at low-income and marginalized communities, we should focus our efforts on ensuring we protect those most in need. While we can appreciate that fighting this virus will create unpredictable challenges, both logistical and budgetary in nature, we believe you have more effective fundraising tools at your disposal than education spending. Moving forward, we hope you make use of these many tools and protect education funding at all costs.

Sincerely,



Jamaal Bowman
Member of Congress



Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

⁴ Mujica Jr., Robert. "New York State FY 2021 Mid-Year Update." *New York State Governor's Office*. 2021

⁵ McDonough, Annie. "How much New York is getting in the COVID-19 relief bill." *City & State*. Feb. 10, 2021

⁶ Office of Elementary & Secondary Education. "American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund: State Allocations." *Department of Education*. March 2021